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ABSTRACT

In Project Choice, Ewing Marion Kauffman, through his Kauffman Foundation, offered a college education to inner city youth in selected schools in Kansas City, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri. In exchange students and parents agreed among other things that students would avoid disciplinary problems in school and the community, maintain satisfactory grades, and graduate on time with their class. The Kauffman Foundation learned that this type of incentive program can motivate young people to stay in school, but that there is a number of academic and social skill obstacles that even the promise of a free college education cannot overcome. Of the 1,394 students who signed Project Choice agreements, 767 graduated on time, and 709 of these students continued their educations. Ten significant lessons were drawn from the Project Choice experience: (1) inner-city students can succeed; (2) support services are crucial; (3) the attention of caring adults is more powerful than the promise of a college education; (4) parents count; (5) high school graduation is not the end; (6) schools opt out if they are not full members; (7) flexibility is essential; (8) kids need ongoing rewards and recognition; (9) incentive is expensive; and (10) permanence requires community partnership. Interviews with six individuals affected in different ways by Project Choice are included. Parents, students, and teachers speak about the lessons learned by the Kauffman Foundation through Project Choice. (SLD)

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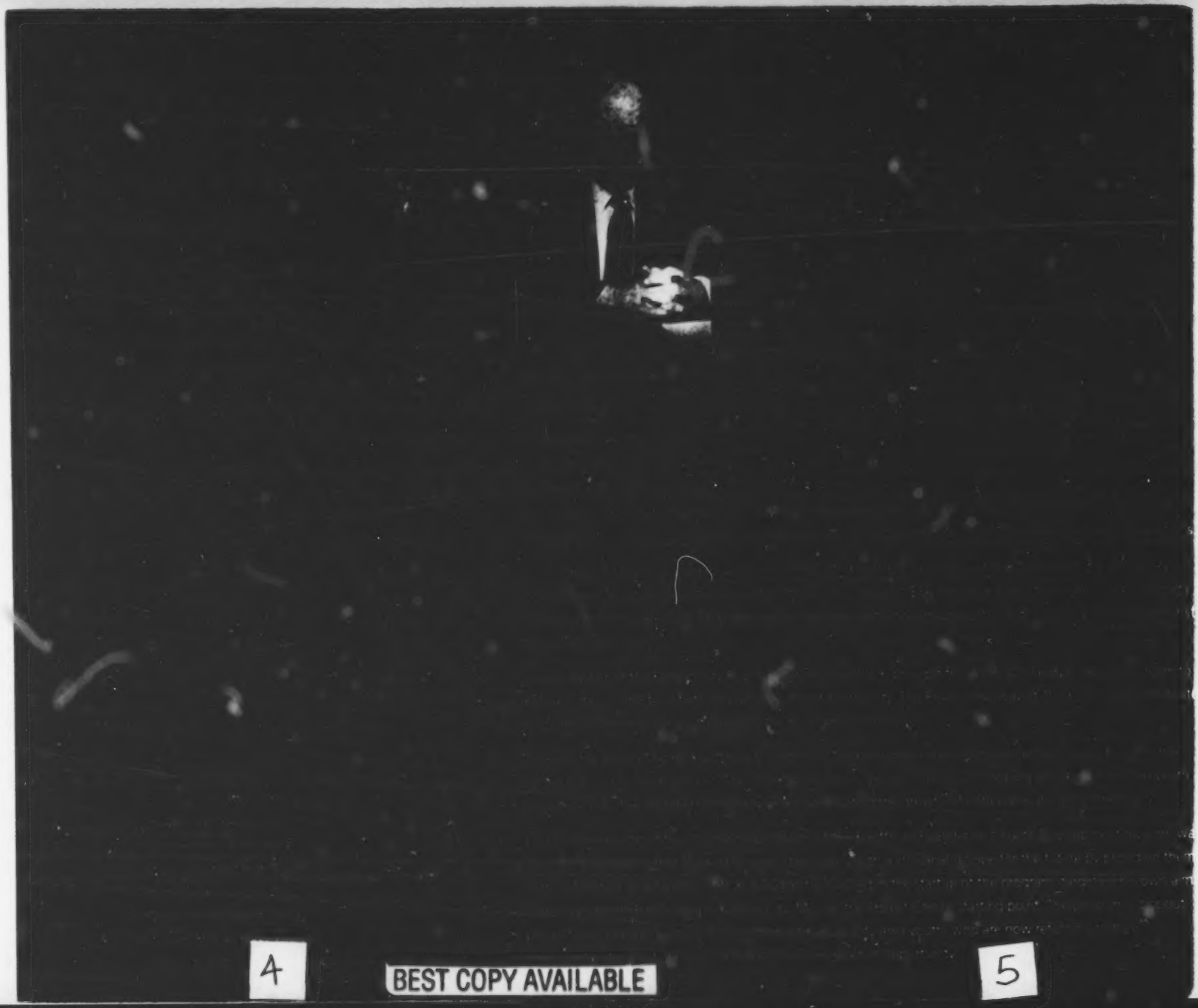

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Introduction to Project Choice

Project Choice started out as one of those too good to be true opportunities: A successful entrepreneur, who believes strongly in the power of education, decides to fund college education for youth in the urban core; urban-core youth find support, success and hope for the future. It seemed like a win-win situation for youth from low-income families and the community as a whole. The Kauffman Foundation learned that a motivational, multilevel, support-based program like Choice can inspire young people to stay in school, but there are a number of academic and social skill obstacles that even the promise of a free college education cannot overcome.

Between 1988 and 1992, nearly 1,400 ninth grade students in the Kansas City, Kan., and Kansas City, Mo., school districts agreed to be part of Project Choice. Students and their parents agreed that the student would maintain satisfactory grades, receive tutoring, avoid parenthood, avoid disciplinary problems in school and in the community, abstain from using illegal drugs and graduate on time with their class. In exchange, each student who successfully completed the terms of the Project Choice agreement received a paid college or vocational education at a state or regional institution of their choice.

Of the 1,394 students who signed Project Choice agreements, 767 students graduated on time and violated none of the agreement's terms. Some 709 of those students continued their educations at two-year community colleges, four-year universities, technical training or business schools. As this report is written, 47 students have graduated, and seven students are enrolled in graduate school.

From the Project Choice experience emerged 10 significant lessons on the pinnacles and pitfalls of operating a dropout prevention program:

1. Inner-city kids can succeed.
2. Support services are crucial.
3. The attention of caring adults is more powerful than the incentive of post-secondary education.
4. Parents count.
5. High school graduation is not the end.
6. Schools opt out of the game when they are not full team members.
7. Flexibility is key: Be prepared to change.
8. Kids need ongoing rewards and recognition.
9. Incentive is expensive.
10. Permanence requires community partnerships.

On the following pages are interviews with six individuals affected in different ways by Project Choice. Parents, students, teachers and others associated with the program spoke out to illustrate some of the most poignant lessons learned by the Kauffman Foundation regarding Project Choice. It is hoped that by sharing these stories, other organizations, schools or individuals can design successful dropout prevention programs that have lasting impact on their communities.

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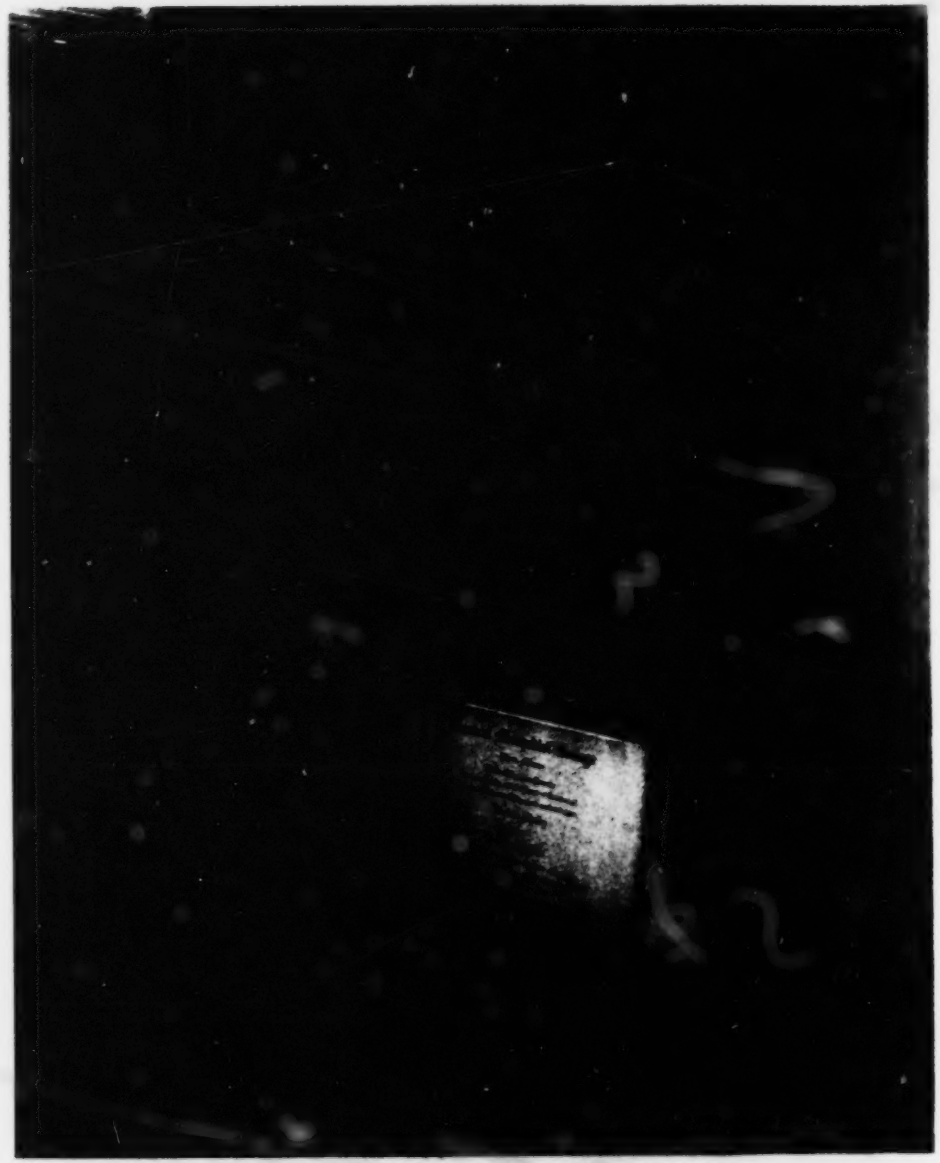
LESSON ONE

Inner-City Kids Can Succeed.

Ewing Kauffman believed that despite the barriers of poverty, inner-city "at-risk" youth can become productive members of society if they each receive a good education. But sometimes, it's not that easy. Far too often, by the time inner-city young people reach ninth grade they really don't see themselves as learners or as capable of long-term intellectual achievement. In fact, many students begin to lose hope as early as third grade, when the ability to understand what one reads becomes what sets some students apart from — and ahead of — others. Add to that a variety of family or social problems, and you have a generation of inner-city students who probably won't succeed because they bring too much "baggage" for schools and communities to handle. Although intervention in ninth grade is not the answer to all students' long-term learning issues, a motivational, hands-on high school program built on the sustained, personal attention of caring adults can inspire young people to stay in school and give learning a second try.



THE FOUNDATION LEARNED THAT:

Sponsors of programs like Project Choice should expect that ninth grade interventions will result in highly diverse outcomes that depend on the students' baseline skills and achievement levels, as well as the degree to which they are affected by complex family, social and health problems.

Despite many Project Choice program refinements, the most that could be achieved with any one program group was a 55-to-60 percent high school graduation rate.

"It was the 'cream of the crop' students who got all the attention from teachers when I was in high school," recalls Elizabeth, a 1993 graduate of a Kansas City, Mo., high school. "Those were the kids who got the college prep classes and extra time from teachers."

Elizabeth admits, however, that she could have done more to seek out that "track" in high school.

"I was in and out of trouble. You know how it is. ... I was in my own world then," she says. "I probably didn't take high school or my involvement in Project Choice too seriously until I started going to Choice's Saturday School. Whoa, then it all started to hit me that I had to get serious if I planned to even think about college."

Saturday School was just like it sounds: school on Saturdays. It was started primarily to give students who were in danger of not graduating with their class a chance to make up failed courses. Master teachers, designated by the school district, taught Saturday School courses, offering one-on-one instruction and an opportunity for independent learning. When Elizabeth realized through Saturday School that she still had a chance to try harder in school and really succeed, she went after her goal aggressively.

"I decided I wanted to prove everyone wrong and do it!" she says. "I was the only one out of all my brothers and sisters who graduated from high school, much less went on to finish college. My mom is real proud of all her kids, but she was pretty thrilled that I was finishing my education."

Elizabeth attended Central Methodist College in Fayette, Mo. "It was the only school out of town that accepted me," she says with a laugh. Elizabeth says most post-secondary institutions weren't interested in her because of her grades and other issues that hindered her success her freshman year in high school. But CMC was willing to take her on. "I was so excited when I got that acceptance letter. I don't think I've ever jumped that high in my life!"

In her junior year at CMC, Elizabeth, who was studying psychology, became pregnant. She continued to work and attend school throughout her pregnancy and returned to a full class schedule after the birth of her son. Project Choice continued to support Elizabeth because she had already proven her ability to overcome obstacles and emerge victorious. Indeed, Elizabeth went on to graduate from CMC with her class. She recently got married and is now looking for work in her chosen field.

"I am one of the many kids who fell into a trap where people didn't care, especially teachers," Elizabeth says. "I had good family support, but kids have to have teachers who believe in them or else they'll fall through the cracks. We're all conditioned to do certain things, teachers included. If they get rid of the not-so-smart kids, they can focus on the good ones, and I understand that. Project Choice was my chance to escape that trap, and I took advantage of what it had to offer me."

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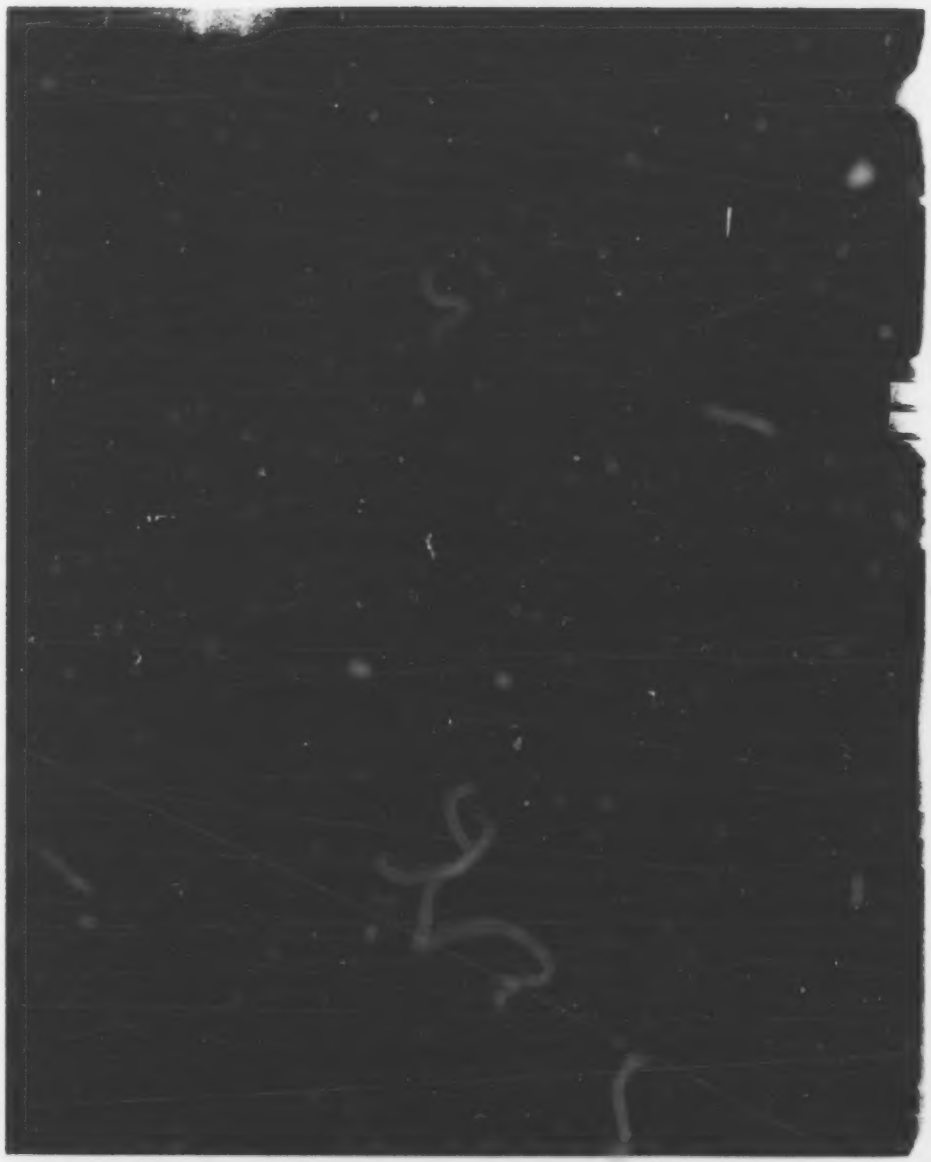
LESSON TWO

Support Services are Crucial.



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PROJECT CHOICE LEARNED THAT:

A wide variety of support services must be offered, especially in high school. Be prepared to spend about 80 percent of the program's budget on support services.

"We talked a lot about resume building, community service and topics outside the realm of a typical inner-city high school," says Ken, a senior at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan., who refers to the special class in which all Choice students at his Kansas City, Kan., high school were enrolled. "The class counselors and Choice staff were really trying to expose us to as much as possible to help us prepare for life beyond the inner city."

Although Ken first viewed this class as just something he had to do as a Choice student, he came to understand that it was part of a full slate of support offered through his high school by Project Choice. Throughout high school, Ken explored virtually all the support services offered by Choice to help him achieve his goal of attending college.

"Choice paid for me to take the ACT, which was great. But probably the best thing the staff did for me was to take me on campus visits, especially the one here at KSU," Ken says.

His KSU experience was a three-week enrichment program, the summer before his junior year in high school, where Choice students were offered the opportunity to live in the KSU dorms, take some abbreviated classes for future credit, explore college-life issues and bond with KSU staff and other Choice students.

"It was so great. I actually didn't want to leave when it was over," Ken recalls. Ken's family endorsed his involvement in Project Choice; however, his mother and stepfather were unable to provide any other kind of financial or emotional security for him. For students like Ken who lack a strong family connection, the support he felt from Choice and KSU fostered a second-family relationship.

"I admit, I latched on to the staff early on. And once Choice kids became students at KSU, we had access to peer and faculty mentors and tutoring, and we had opportunities to network with other Choice students. All of us knew we could go to any Choice staff member or our faculty mentor when we needed advice or guidance. It was nice to have that safety net."

Ken's advice for other dropout prevention programs: Emphasize campus visits, counsel and prepare students for rigors of post-secondary academics; and add some type of "culture shock" preparation for students who, like Ken, go from urban-core high schools, where the population is composed primarily of people of color, to college campuses where students predominantly are white.

"But most important," Ken adds, "Make the college follow-up and monitoring — especially mentoring — part of the initial contract. That continuous contact is what keeps a lot of students on track."

Ken concludes with thanks to Ewing Kauffman. "I never had a chance to meet Mr. K, but if I could talk to him today I'd let him know that Project Choice helped me feel a sense of belonging. It created a fantastic opportunity for me to learn leadership skills and to feel good about what I can contribute. Choice really created a passion in me to share my experience, and I hope by doing that I can help someone like me in the future."

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LESSON THREE

The Attention of Caring Adults is More Powerful than the Incentive of Post-Secondary Education.

It is widely held belief that teenagers are primarily interested in immediate gratification. They want information in small bites and they want it quick. It stands to reason that eighth graders do not find the prospect of college, or some other reward that will come later rather than sooner, particularly interesting. They want to know what's in it for them right here, right now. The Choice students found instant gratification in adult attention and guidance, which many teens would and need but may not know how to pursue. Sustained contact with Choice staff members and tutors, along with Mr. K's personal involvement, sent a message to the Choice students that they were individuals worthy of attention from caring adults.

THE FOUNDATION LEARNED THAT:

Caring, tutoring and mentoring, along with high expectations in academics and behavior for Project Choice participation, paid off in reduced incidence of drug abuse and increased incidence of student retention.

As students progressed from one grade to the next, college or career training took on increased importance for those Choice students who were making the greatest academic improvements. They began to see education as worthwhile and that post-secondary education was an attainable goal.

"The great thing about Project Choice is that [the staff] never forgot about me. They were always there," says Michael, a senior at St. Louis University and a Project Choice student from Westport High School in Kansas City, Mo. This revelation comes eight years after Michael signed the agreement that bound him to academic success.

When he was a student in Westport Junior High, Michael wasn't all that interested in school. "I did well, but I just wasn't into school," he says. "I got by in the courses I liked, but I had no real motivation to achieve." And because of his family's financial constraints, Michael had not even contemplated college. He calls the idea "inconceivable" at that time.

But one day, Michael's mother read an article in the local newspaper outlining what Ewing Kauffman was doing with Project Choice at Westport High School. "At that point," Michael says, "it was not a given that I would attend Westport High, even though I was already a student at Westport Junior High. My mom was trying to get me a scholarship to another private high school because she thought my chances of getting a college scholarship would be better. But after she read the article, my mom worked it out so that I could go to Westport and get into Project Choice."

Michael describes his initial experiences with the Choice staff as unusual, something to which he was not accustomed. He says, "I've always been very independent. The Choice staff kind of pushed their way into my life, but not in a bad way. It was hard to get used to, but it didn't take me long to figure out that they were doing that to help me.

"It was more than just a job to the staff. When they spent a lot of extra time with me, it wasn't because they had to. They really wanted me to succeed, and they were willing to do whatever they could to help me. That's what meant so much to me and my family."

Michael bears witness to how important it is for programs like Choice to work well with school staff. "I had a guidance counselor at Westport, Ms. Stokes," Michael recalls. "Well, when I was falling down on the job and not doing what I should to get a better grade or whatever, Adriana Pecina (a Choice staffer) and Ms. Stokes would call me in and tell me what was what and what I needed to do to improve. It's funny because I was real stubborn, but I always complied because I didn't see them as authority figures. I viewed them as people who cared about what happened to me, who wanted me to live up to my potential."

Michael is now planning to graduate from St. Louis University with a degree in psychology, and he may pursue a graduate degree with an emphasis on relationship counseling. But without both the financial and emotional support from Project Choice, Michael says he wouldn't have made it this far. "Oh, I'd probably still be in Kansas City, working somewhere," he says. "I wouldn't be poor or homeless or anything like that. I'd be moderately successful. But now I'll be the first in my family to graduate from college. Project Choice really helped motivate me to do well in school and brought me closer to my family."

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LESSON FOUR

Parents Count.

We live in a society where children go to school while adults go to work inside and outside the home. The students get the attention, the adults provide the support. So who's looking after the parents to keep them engaged in their children's academic life?

Project C knew we'd the extra role to make parents feel not only welcome but a necessary part of students' success. Parents or guardians of C house students were offered meetings and retreats to help them with decision making, communication and parenting skills. Field trips and achievement celebrations were also provided for C house families. But each family has individual needs. Programs like C house need to carefully examine their populations and institute a variety of relevant family services and activities that build pride and commitment to the program.

PROJECT CHOICE LEARNED THAT:

Parents are more likely to participate in activities that address specific, relevant needs.

Families are more likely to participate in relevant activities when they take place on neutral turf (not in schools) and when there is child care available.

It's a good idea to appoint a program staff member to the role of parent activity coordinator. Even so, it is not easy to maintain long-term involvement of low-income parents, many of whom are struggling daily with financial constraints and other social challenges.

Esperanza Alvarez is one of those parents who revels in her children's success. She has encouraged all seven of her kids to get a good education and choose a rewarding career that they like.

"My younger brother and I were both Choice kids," says Esperanza's daughter, Maria, a graduate of George Washington University in Washington, D.C. "He was the one who was really embarrassed that our mother was so excited about Project Choice. She went to all the parent meetings and workshops. My brother tried to get her to stop raising her hand and talking all the time, but she just kept on doing it. Our mother was so proud that we were Choice kids."

Maria recalls that her mother was involved from the beginning. "She pretty much forced me to go to Sumner Academy (a Kansas City, Kan., high school with strict admission standards) because of its difficult curriculum. I didn't want to go there because all of my friends were going to another high school. But I passed the entrance exam and went. I never really liked it because I was one of the only Hispanic females there. But I was into sports and kept myself busy. It was a good education."

Maria knew that her mother's encouragement and exuberance over Project Choice was directly connected to the fact that the Choice students had to stay on track to get to that paid college education. She realizes that without the Choice program, she probably wouldn't have been able to attend George Washington, which she chose because of its excellent criminal justice program.

"Programs like Choice are so helpful to young people," Esperanza says. "When they get out of college they get to make a start for themselves with no college bills left over to pay. Project Choice made a big difference in that way.

I tell my children and all kids I talk to that they must keep going. A life without education is a hard one, especially here in the United States."

Esperanza says that she particularly enjoyed the opportunities Project Choice provided for parenting classes. She says she learned a lot about how to talk to her children about school. Maria confirms that her mother was transformed by the training sessions.

"Once she took a stress management class offered by Choice and came home and used it on us that same night!" Maria says with a laugh. "Choice helped her in more ways than she expected. My mom is a single parent. Choice made it easier for my family financially, and we are proof that it was an excellent program to bring parents and students closer together."

To this day, Esperanza holds Ewing Kauffman in the highest regard. She once met him, and she proudly displays in her home a framed newspaper article about his life.

"I collect any kind of picture or article I can find that talks about Mr. Kauffman. He was such a great man. And what he did for us, for all the kids, that was such a wonderful thing."

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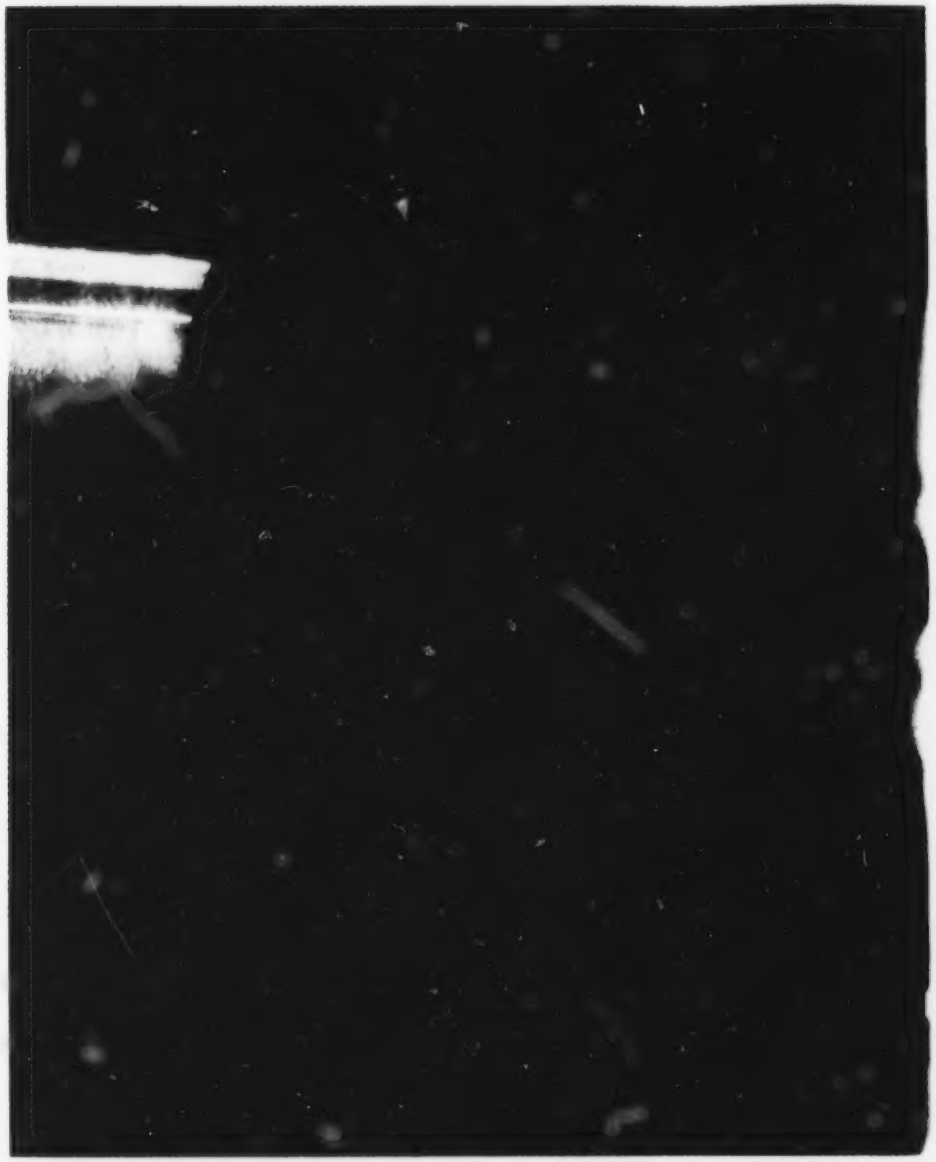
LESSON FIVE

High School Graduation Is Not the End.

Most students and parents will say that a successful dropout prevention program is one that sees students through to an on-time high school graduation. But is that enough? Project Choice wanted more for its students.

If the program truly expected that its high school graduates would go on to college and be successful, it stood to reason that collegiate-level support services were a necessary part of the Project Choice program. Although time-intensive and expensive, collegiate support helps move high school graduates to a new level of success as college graduates.



PROJECT CHOICE LEARNED THAT:

Students who intend to go on to college or vocational training need a high level of support in developing test-taking skills, evaluating career options, and then researching and applying to colleges and universities. In addition, they need ongoing support to prepare for and manage social changes such as leaving home for the first time, managing a less-structured schedule and understanding that they may be faced with discrimination and alienation in a racially diverse world. Program students who do not go on to college or vocational training need help examining their workplace options.

Even when tuition, room, board and books are paid for, students need to work while in college to cover incidental expenses. A number of Choice students indicate they have struggled because their excessive work hours take significant time away from their studies.

"I know where these students are coming from," says Bernard Franklin, former Assistant Dean of Students and Choice campus coordinator for Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan. "It's a strange environment for urban core students. Most are coming from an African-American or multicultural high school environment to a mostly Caucasian campus. But with ongoing support, these students learn how to adapt and assimilate."

Franklin, himself a KSU alumnus, made it his personal responsibility to help Choice students prepare for the social and academic transition from high school to college, and beyond. As Choice coordinator, he instituted a summer enrichment program in which Choice students, in the summer before their junior or senior year in high school, could come to KSU for a few weeks to learn the highs and lows of campus life.

"During enrichment, we required participants to live in the dorms under the supervision of a resident adviser," Franklin recalls. "For at least half of the kids, this was their first trip away from home, away from Kansas City." Participants were in classes all morning, directed study in the afternoons and discussion sessions in the evenings in which Franklin and other enrichment staff members talked to them about cultural diversity, sexual responsibility and independence.

While the enrichment experience was a self-confidence builder for most all participants, the payoff was even greater for students who ended up attending the university. Franklin and his team of peer and faculty mentors made sure that KSU Choice students received an array of support services.

"We were their first point of contact for everything from choosing classes to buying sports tickets, from homesickness to nutrition concerns," Franklin says of Choice students. "And we made sure we introduced these students to others who could help them, because we all know from experience that sometimes success comes down to who you know.

"Also, Lynn Leonard (Choice staffer) and I kept weekly contact. Lynn and I talked about things we wouldn't normally even discuss with the parents of these students. But we had to be straight with each other when conduct or other problems arose, and we had to establish our own set of consequences for students who 'broke the rules.' The students, though, had a relationship with us and could trust and depend on us."

Franklin says he would change only a couple of Choice program components. First, he says, he would encourage program staff to network with a variety of post-secondary institutions to create a better bridge between high school life and college life. Franklin also recommends that college preparation begin earlier.

"It's too late to start talking to students about college when they're juniors or seniors," he contends. "Start building expectations in ninth grade or even earlier, and help high school students develop a work ethic that will serve them in college or work life. And students need to start a college prep track — emphasis on math, science and writing — earlier in their academic life.

"We're at a point where a college degree today carries the same weight a high school diploma did 20 or 25 years ago. Urban-core students who have an opportunity to attend college and succeed will carry that experience back to their communities as role models for other kids."

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LESSON SIX

Schools Opt Out of the Game When They Are Not Full Team Members.

Project Choice's planning team believed that an independent program that cooperated with a school system would function more smoothly than a program that was integrated into a school's complex bureaucracy and regulatory systems. Choice would be a self-sustaining, effective school improvement model that would and should be managed outside of the schools.

When the program was launched, school district officials in Kansas and Missouri somewhat agreed with Choice's premise of independence: the project's goals were laudable, and it would cost the schools little in the way of time, money and staff resources. In reality, without a vested interest and early input into the planning and design of the program, schools felt little responsibility or ownership of the program, and most school staff members involved were not clear on what, if any, mutually desired outcomes were to be achieved.

Overall, Project Choice had a lasting impact on the individual students it served, and it positively affected individual teachers who benefited from and valued the professional development. Choice's impact on change in overall schools, however, remains to be seen.

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PROJECT CHOICE LEARNED THAT:

If a program is to have a long-term effect on how schools conduct business, it must involve teachers and principals early in the planning stages so school staff can develop a sense of ownership and ownership. Without such interest from those parties, a program can live only as long as the person keeps it afloat. There is nothing like the stability that comes with widespread enthusiasm.

Larry Englebrick became fully aware of Project Choice and jumped in with both feet exactly 48 hours after he had been named principal of Harmon High School in Kansas City, Kan., in 1989. Harmon was part of the small-group model for Project Choice, as opposed to a whole-school effort.

"I didn't have a lot of time to get up to speed on what Project Choice was all about, what its goals were," says Englebrick, from his office at the Kansas City, Kan., School District headquarters. "I did have the summer, however, to identify 30 students to be the pilot group for this opportunity, and we got them and their parents to sign the Choice agreement."

Englebrick recalls that the first year of the Choice program at Harmon had its ups and downs. Then, Harmon took the proverbial bull by the horns and made a commitment to Choice and its goal of seeing students, who otherwise may not have had an opportunity for post-secondary education, graduate and become successful at whatever they chose to do.

"We appointed a school staff member," Englebrick says, "who agreed to stick with the original Choice kids until their graduation; we improved basic skills and reduced absenteeism among those students; we arranged for college campus field trips that were offered only to Choice students. And, we asked school counselors to provide some extra guidance to the Choice kids."

This specialized structure was not dictated by Choice; it was designed by Harmon staff in an attempt to make the program as successful as possible there. Each school that joined in the program had to make its own set of guidelines based on individual student populations because as sound a program as Choice was for student retention, schools were not involved in the program's initial design.

"The Choice staff was very helpful and available to us. But we became very frustrated, especially the teachers," Englebrick says. "Even though we instituted a number of measures to help the students be successful through Choice, we set it up wrong. We established a mandatory directed study period for the kids during their sixth hour each day, but the amount and variety of work that each student had from all of his or her teachers schoolwide proved to be too much for one study director to handle. It would have been easy at that point to give up the Choice program. That's when we made another change that I believe was the secret to our success with Choice."

A handful of Harmon administrators and teachers decided to group the 30 Choice students together so that each student was receiving the same core curriculum from the same teachers.

"The teachers absolutely led the effort," Englebrick recalls. "They worked to get one concentrated group of students moved from one level to the next, culminating in better grades overall and, ultimately, graduation. This experience changed the whole way teachers communicated and taught at Harmon. I believe it was a first, critical step in school improvement."

"The issues we worked through with Choice reflected issues schoolwide," Englebrick says. "Even after Choice was finished at Harmon, what we learned about finding new ways to teach lasted. Out of Project Choice grew a core of teachers who were focused on school improvement, who carry on that legacy with Harmon students today."

"School change is a slow process," Englebrick concludes. "It occurs over decades, not over months. I think people look at Choice and don't realize how successful it was as a tool for working through and achieving long-term change."

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PROJECT CHOICE

Choice Profiles Conclusion

The stories depicted in this book capture the essence of what Project Choice was all about: helping Kansas City-area young people at risk of dropping out of high school realize and live up to their potential as learners and good citizens.

While six lessons are featured in these pages, the Kauffman Foundation documented 10 lessons learned from operating Project Choice. The remaining four lessons are summarized here.

Lesson Seven: Flexibility is key: Be prepared to change.

When you've got as many players involved in a program as were in Choice, program staff members must be ready for anything, everyday. Choice students had revolving and evolving academic and social needs, and schools had systems change and effectiveness issues to address. These two factors alone could break down any program not prepared to be flexible. The "Can Do" attitude of Choice staff members carried over to the students and schools, and the groups worked together to treat each day as a possible avenue to unexpected opportunities and to overcome these circumstances as best they could.

What happens when a successful high school student drops out of the program and out of school altogether? What happens when a choice college student has to leave school for a semester for family reasons, but then wants to return to the program? What happens when a teacher is misinformed about his or her role in the Choice program? The Choice staff examined the program continuously to determine how to improve day by day. Even so, there is no way to predict the success of individual dropout prevention programs because people, places, histories, economies, climates, cultures and institutions all differ and must be treated as one-of-a-kind circumstances.

Lesson Eight: Kids need ongoing rewards and recognition.

As adults, if someone offers us money to pay off a car or a home within four years if we just do the right thing — mow the neighbor's lawn, walk the family dog, don't get parking tickets, keep our cars washed, stay employed — we're likely to jump at the offer, because in the grand scheme of things, four years in the life of an adult seems like a drop in the bucket for such a great reward. But for some ninth graders, the promise of a paid college education just doesn't sound that stupendous because they have no frame of reference. What further complicates dropout prevention programs like Choice is that they are up against a strong opponent in the lives of adolescents: peer pressure.

To address this lack of enthusiasm among students for what was coming to them "down the road," Ewing Kauffman and the Choice staff planned ways to make the program more fun in the short term for students. Family dinners, picnics, softball games, field trips and other events were organized to provide "competition" for the activities that might have distracted the students into doing something that might violate their Choice agreement. Dropout prevention programs like Choice must make themselves appealing in ways other than financially to keep students interested and active.

Lesson Nine: Incentive is expensive.

Most families feel the same pain: Putting one child through college can quickly drain finances, leaving little money for other family needs or for other children in the family to attend college. It stands to reason that programs like Choice that pay for college education for hundreds of students carry enormous price tags.

By the year 2001, when the final class of Choice students will have graduated from colleges, universities or other institutions of higher learning, the Kauffman Foundation will have spent more than $22 million dollars on tuition, books, room, board and support services, both secondary and post-secondary. But early studies seem to indicate that the investment pays off for the communities to which these students return to work. A 1995 cost-benefit analysis of Project Choice revealed that each class of Choice students will contribute $.3 million more to the tax base than students in their class not receiving a high school degree.

It is unusual that the estate of one individual can pay for a project as expensive as Choice. That's why Ewing Kauffman hoped that other community organizations and foundations would band together to continue the funding stream for dropout prevention efforts. The need for additional support and funding sources is an important consideration for any dropout prevention program.

Lesson Ten: Permanence requires community partnership.

As mentioned in Lesson Nine above, deep involvement and commitment of the community is necessary in sustaining the tradition of a successful dropout prevention program. Project Choice was warmly regarded by those who knew of it and understood it, but the program was viewed as Mr. K's. Without widespread community investment, the program was destined to dissolve over time. Families, businesses, the religious community, the philanthropic community, schools and government all have a significant role to play in sustaining programs like Choice. The models for student success work, and there is money for them in the private sector, but forging effective coalitions is a program component that Project Choice did not have time to establish in its decade of operating.

A lesson not documented here is that program staff members must be dedicated to the long-term life of the program. Project Choice was fortunate in that its staff members never gave up. They were always on call for the students and the schools. Without the consistent support and commitment of trained, knowledgeable staff, programs like Choice likely will spend valuable resources on overcoming internal dysfunction. The staff members listed here worked collaboratively with their knees bent, always extending themselves beyond their work load to meet the needs of program participants. Project Choice owes a great deal of its success to Angelynn Barge, high school coordinator; Andrew Dominguez, post-secondary specialist for school achievement; Leon Franklin, specialist for school and family services; Lynn Leonard, program manager; Viki Lucas, specialist for school and family services; Adriana Pecina, post-secondary specialist for school achievement; Tom Rhone, senior program director; Gwen Richtermeyer, Saturday School developer and senior research and evaluation program specialist; Alycia Rodriguez, family activity and student support specialist; Jeanne Stroh, financial coordinator; and Susan Wally, senior program director for education.

What the Kauffman Foundation learned from operating Project Choice fundamentally changed the way its Youth Development division works to contribute to the healthy development of children in our communities and in our nation. The lessons Project Choice learned are just one part of the larger field of dropout prevention study, but these lessons contribute to the field both in terms of program content and program process. However, programs like Choice can only be fully measured through the passage of time. The journey from childhood to self-sufficient adulthood is a long one, but with self-determination and support of those who care, Choice students and others like them are destined for success.

For more information about the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation or Project Choice, visit the Foundation Web site at www.emkf.org.

The report that documents these lessons and details all the components of Project Choice is available in executive summary format on the Foundation Web site and can be ordered, in its entirety, there or from the Kauffman Foundation's Youth Development division at 816-932-1207.

The PROJECT CHOICE: WHOLE SCHOOL MODEL *research report has been published by the Kauffman Foundation and can be ordered through the Foundation Web site or by contacting the Kauffman Foundation's Research and Evaluation department at 816-932-1108.*

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